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## A Mind Prober as a Metaphor. Of Solar, of Visual, of Parabolic, of Comic, and of Punk Mind

### Abstract

This is an introduction to a special issue of *Issues of Literary Types*, which has no special topic. The author of the introduction reflects on the metaphor of the mind prober used to define a genre of a topic-free issue of a scientific journal. In the case of a scientific journal, the research area is strictly defined, as in the case of thematic issues: the area is defined by the leading subject matter. It is different in the case of an issue without a topic: the area is outlined, but what topics will stand out in the foreground depends on the current state of the collective mind. In this context, a probe as a tool for examining the collective mind of a group is an extremely attractive metaphor. One computer game program was called “Mind Prober.” It tried to determine a gamer’s personality and give advice based on the gamer’s answers to questions. It is described as an early self-analysis program.

We obviously live in the sentimental era as defined by Schiller in an essay called *Naive and sentimental*. We can define our time by our hopes and dreams such as solarpunk. We can refer to comedy as a genre which is better than tragedy or apocalyptic. Parable, isomorphism in multimodality, projecting and invisible: they are all genre-like states of mind which might characterize our situation confronting crises and catastrophes.

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## **Introduction**

In our current issue, an issue without a leading theme, humanist researchers of both the youngest and more mature generations meet here and now. However, it is striking that these publications are dominated by interests present also in social media and the so-called popular culture, whether it be solarpunk (Michał Klata), Agamben's concept of comedy (Miłosz Żak), the parabolic nature of reportage (Katarzyna Frukacz), or the invisibility and visibility of letters' design (Justyna Tuszyńska), there will always be lively disputes in the field of culture in the background, popular and also online, often open culture (cf. Anna Zatora). It seems, therefore, that if off-topic issues of journals were a kind of environmental probe examining what currently moves the minds of researchers, it could be said for sure that our minds are very involved in the present, in the contemporary cultural world. However, our current issue does not lack more historical shots. For instance, Mariusz Gołąb deals with the problem of the literary image presented in the works by Stefania Skwarczyńska, our journal's founding mother. The concept of the image series is analyzed in Skwarczyńska's theoretic works and monographs on Polish romantic poets such as Juliusz Słowacki and Adam Mickiewicz. However, one of the topics raised by the author of the article is media isomorphism by Rudolph Arnhem, which corresponds well with the contemporary situation in culture described as 'post-scripture' culture, as Jacek Dukaj, a Polish futurologist and science fiction writer, puts it (in polish 'po piśmie'). Thus, even when researchers are concerned with the history of literature, culture, and theory, they evoke scripts characteristic of our multi-media, digital reality. In our issue, however, you can find extremely interesting reviews of very serious historical studies in which researchers Michał Kuran and Andrzej Juchniewicz meet historians such as Roma Sendyka and Małgorzata Ciszewska who are dealing with the cultural phenomena related to death.

## **Naive and Sentimental**

In his essays on the novel, Orhan Pamuk wrote a sentence that is very paradoxical, but which reflects well the meaning of the whole stream of typological considerations on writing: "The trick is for the novelist to be both naive and reflective" (Pamuk 2012: 18). In the next sentence, this Turkish Nobel Prize winner from 2006 referred to a very old

conceptual division introduced into the theoretical and critical discourse by Friedrich Schiller in his treatise *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (1795–1796). It is impossible in these introductory writings to summarize the entire discussion around a category as extensive as sentimentality, which has been overgrown with comments and various interpretations (cf. Płuciennik 2016, cited in Solomon 1990 and 1991). It is worth emphasizing that this sentimentality is not necessarily associated directly with the more common way of understanding sentimentality and sentimentalism. However, Orhan Pamuk himself, in the sentence quoted at the beginning of this piece, gives an interpretation of sentimentality as reflexiveness, i.e., we are dealing here with a division of literature that will be either objective or subjective (reflective), or — according to Orhan Pamuk's postulate — objective and subjective at the same time. It is a difficult and complex art.

For an expert in this period (Sturm und Drang, or Late Enlightenment, Pre-Romanticism, Sentimentalism) in literature, the search for references in Pamuk's sketch to William Blake's "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience" may end in disappointment. Although, on the other hand, it should not be surprising, because both the songs of this innocence and this experience are extremely "sentimental", they have nothing to do with the childish — according to Schiller — direct way of seeing things in the works of Dante, Shakespeare and, Cervantes or — finally — Goethe. Even though Blake's double songs are partly about children (cf. e.g., the poem "Chimney sweeper"), they certainly do not appeal to children, they are not childish, although the songs of innocence sound good-natured and naive. Schiller's "naive writers", on the other hand, according to this concept have contact with nature as such, while the "sentimental" writers treat nature as an ideal, as a certain project (this is the case with Blake). Moreover, the "sentimental" become great thanks to the strength of their feelings and their idealism, while the "naive" have a genius in themselves.

### **Solarpunk**

It seems that the concept of solarpunk carries such a tension as Schiller's naive-sentimental opposition, although both parts of this complex genre-related name refer to subjective retrotopia, which also seems to be indicated by the extensive, but homogeneous aesthetics of the iconosphere associated with this movement a social project called solarpunk.

Utopian studies and dystopian studies seem to be well established in literary studies and, more broadly, in the humanities. As research on the latest phenomena in political ideology shows, retrotopia is also increasingly used in research on ideology related to the latest cultural creations, such as literature and film (cf. Bar-Itzhak 2021; Płuciennik, Sikora-Krizhevska 2022). According to Bauman, nostalgia for the elements of the past may take the form of longing for the absolutist power of the sovereign, symbolically embodied in the title and cover of Hobbes' book *Leviathan* (1651). It can also be longing and an escape into tribalism, of various types (like nationalism). Also, a restoration of social inequality. After all, nostalgia is a narcissistic turn to self from the past, best embodied in the symbolism of the maternal womb, as Bauman puts it.

Utopian studies have been featured in our journal before, for instance in 2019 (Maj 2019), in 2020 (a whole issue was devoted to the problem of utopian studies: 2020 vol. 1) and in 2021 (Sargent, Krzywicki). Historically, also in the old materials for the dictionary

of literary genres the milieu of our magazine was occupied by the concept of utopia, even one of the founding fathers of our journal dealt with it (See Ostrowski, Szymczyk 2012a).

As Dominika Oramus (2021) writes about it: “Literature studies today is heavily indebted to modern science. Biology (especially evolutionary biology), physics (especially quantum physics), and ecology (especially the Anthropocene studies) are among the most important subjects scholars of literature have to take into account.” Oramus describes literary genres which introduce modern science to the readers: science fiction, cyberpunk, solarpunk, lablit, quantum fiction, and cli-fi. The humanities must deal with the modern sciences as well as post-modern apocalyptic discourse. In this context it is worthy to see “hope for salvation, for the creation of a civilizationally advanced and at the same time ecologically clean world.” As Oramus puts it, literature becomes a way of expressing these fears and hopes, and new literary subgenres have been born in response to human traumas. Solarpunk seems to be such a subgenre.

It is worthy to notice that solarpunk as an aesthetics is strongly related to the generation of readers and writers who travel between Scylla and Charybdis of the apocalyptic and — greenwashing.

The theme of hope so noticeable in solarpunk is even more expected in the post-pandemic era (see Jackelén 2020) but at the same time it seems that a new realism can also be made visible.

## Comedy

This can also lead as to think about another great literary and cultural opposition between tragic and comedy.

As Tesheiner and Dafonesca write:

According to Agamben (1999), the Aristotelian interpretation of tragedy includes the misfortune of the righteous man, a misfortune that would lead to a conflict between objective guilt and subjective innocence regarding what Aristotle terms *Hamartia*, sometimes translated in Latin as *sin*. Man, wrenched from his prosperity, is thrown into misfortune due to a sin, i.e., it is the innocent man in front of divine justice. Considering this same *Hamartia* in respect to comedy is different because in comedy, given free will, man is guilty of his own misfortune in search of prosperity. Referencing Christian mythology, Agamben sustains a balance between the fall of Adam, the original sin, and tragic thought, on one side, and Christ’s passion, on the other. Comic thought would be close to Christ’s passion in relation to guilt. (Tesheiner, Dafonesca 2017: 51–52)

This is a profound interpretation of the eternal cultural and literary opposition at the same time. Undoubtedly, one of the authors of the current issue of our journal Miłosz Żak writes in interpretations which is part of the discourse on the threads of a very famous Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who also did fall into controversial statements in the context of the pandemic COVID-19.

In this context, it is worth recalling that the use of the comic after the Second World War, after the Holocaust (see Juchniewicz 2022), does not seem to be direct, but rather still fits into a series of tragic, though tragic-comic associations. As Katarzyna Wielechowska writes, “by turning comedy into a form of expressing a tragic vision of existence, the drama

of the absurd resulted in thematization of the very art of comedy — its rules, conventions, and functions” (Wielechowska 2012: 473). In such contexts this might be viewed in the writings of our author, Miłosz Żak (2022) on Agamben and his philosophical interpretation of divine comedy.

### Parable

Parable (from Greek *parabolé*, Latin *parabola* or *similitudio*, Eng. *parable*, Hebr. מָשָׁל *masal*) is very often directly identified with religious discourses, especially if we use the Polish term ‘parable’, we will often refer to biblical parables (Ostrowski, Szymczyk 2012b: 913). But even if we agree, experts on the subject also refer to contemporary novels such as Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* or Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*. Although, as Witold Ostrowski notes, in reference to contemporary novels, the term “parabolicity” is more often used instead of “parabola.”

According to *Complete Word Study Bible* (2003) parable is “a literary genre, device, and style in the form of short, pithy sayings, prophetic utterances, or compositions of comparison (1 Sam. 10:12; 24:13[14]; Ezek. 12:22, 23; 17:2; 20:49[21:5]). It has the sense of a by-word or object spoken of in contempt or derision (Deut. 28:37; 1 Kgs. 9:7; Ps. 44:14[15]; 69:11[12]). It describes a prophetic utterance (Num. 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23; Isa. 14:4; Mic. 2:4). Its meaning is extended to poetry, that often features comparisons, figurative language, etc. (1 Kgs. 4:32[5:12]; Ps. 49:4[5]; 78:2). This word describes short sayings or sentences of wisdom (Job 13:12; 27:1; 29:1; Prov. 10:1; 25:1, etc. in Proverbs).”

But in our humanistic mind prober we can find the concept of the parable applied to various examples of Polish literary reportage. The genre is defined by Katarzyna Frukacz as a didactic story aimed at conveying moral, religious, philosophical, or existential principles by means of allegory, symbolism, and metaphor. The Author of the article finds parables in non-fiction books by Wojciech Jagielski and Katarzyna Surmiak-Domańska, as well as Mariusz Szczygieł and Witold Szablowski. In this paper, Frukacz presents the development of parabolic reportage in twentieth-century Poland giving special emphasis on the so-called Aesopian language, which enabled reporters to pass the Communist censorship thanks to hidden political allusions and other features typical of parable. Of course, contemporary Poland is not equal to the post-war Polish Peoples Republic (Polska Republika Ludowa, PRL).

### Isomorphism

The concept of parable brings to mind another notion, which evokes Mariusz Gołąb analysing in this issue the theorizing of the mother of the founder of our journal, Stefania Skwarczyńska. According to the dictionary meaning, isomorphism is the quality or state of being isomorphic: such as a similarity in organisms of different ancestry resulting from convergence; or similarity of crystalline form between chemical compounds; or a one-to-one correspondence between two mathematical sets especially a homomorphism that is one-to-one.

This isomorphism of convergent structures as described by Gołąb following Arnheim’s *Visual Thinking* from 1969 is evocative in the contemporary multimodal and convergent culture.

## Projecting

In this context, it seems important that Justyna Tuszyńska's essay on the design of letters deals with the process of designing. The author of our essay plays with the opposition between experts in typography/regular "letter users." She describes this opposition as part of what she calls a typographic turn: the popularization of typographical knowledge on the Internet and transfer of discussion about letters from the closed areas of typography to other domains, such as sociology or cultural history. The author refers to works on graphic design theory and confronts them with studies on culture and literature.

## The Invisible Gothic

James's *The Turn of the Screw* is the diamanté story of the modernist adventure with gothic elements in literature. It is worth recalling this game with the reader, which was also screened in the form of a series. The author of the essay in our issue, Marta Gabryelczak-Paprocka looks at the opera, which is more loosely based on the literary prototype. Nevertheless, the most important thing is this ambiguity of events, behaviour and emotions of the characters which make the plot full of innuendos and insinuations. The unreliability of the narrator does not allow an objective assessment of the events described. And the subject story is "please, believe in the ghost"! "Believe in the unbelievable, the invisible..." horror.

## The Humanistic Mind Prober

I would now like to briefly reflect on the metaphor of the mind prober used to define a genre of a topic-free issue of a scientific journal. In the case of a scientific journal, the research area is strictly defined, as in the case of thematic issues: the area is refined by the leading subject matter. It is different in the case of an issue without a topic: the area is outlined, but what topics will stand out in the foreground depends on the current state of the collective mind. In this context, a probe as a tool for examining the collective mind of a group is an extremely attractive metaphor. We don't need to see it at all as one of the many "psychoanalytical" programs released in the mid-1980s. One program was called "Mind Prober" and it was issued by Human Edge. It tried to determine your personality and give you advice based on your answers to questions. It is described as an early self-analysis program.

The computer program called Mind prober was a program invented in an atmosphere saturated with psychoanalysis. If we are not sure whether this psychoanalytic context is appropriate, especially since we are dealing here with the mind of an unspecified collective, then our program can be much better compared to a — so classic, so traditional — a humanistic essay.

If our current issue is a mind prober, what does it tell us about ourselves? We need hope in the future as well as hope in successful ongoing academic communication.

We obviously live in the sentimental era as defined by Schiller in an essay called *On the naive and sentimental poetry*. We can define our time by our hopes and dreams such as solarpunk. We can refer to comedy as a genre which is better than tragedy or apocalyptic. Parable, isomorphism in multimodality, projecting and invisible: they are all genre-like states of mind which might characterize our situation confronting crises and catastrophes.

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